

HQ

by Anne Laird



books . . . affordable, portable, memorable BETWEEN THE PAGES

These days owning an independent bookstore is truly a labor of love rather than one for profits. There are a myriad of reasons to love owning a bookstore, not the least of which is the satisfaction of knowing you have matched someone up with just the right book . . . one that they receive hours of enjoyment from at a relatively small price. Maybe you are reading for escape or comfort, to gain knowledge, for pure pleasure, or as a source of lively conversation. Whatever the reason, you'll always be able to find what you're looking for "between the pages" of a good book.

THE FEMALE FACTOR

When thinking of what I would write about for this article I started creating a list of good books I have read recently to see how I might tie them into an article. **Strangely enough the list seemed to encompass an inordinate number of titles that included the words; wife, mother, daughter and sister.** I thought how coincidental to this time of year that my list would include so many books with these words in their title. With Mother's Day just recently passed the important women in our lives are front and center in our minds. While some of the women in these books might not be exemplary representations of wives, mothers, daughters or sisters, they all make for some good reading!

WIVES

If you ever read other people's reviews online, you will notice most people either loved *The Reliable Wife* by Robert Goolrick or couldn't stand it. Whether you end up liking it or not, you can't deny the mastery of Goolrick's writing. Set in Wisconsin in 1907, Ralph Truitt, a wealthy businessman, places an ad in the newspaper for a "reliable wife". Catherine Land, a young woman who has managed to survive till now through the use of her wits and sexuality, decides to answer the ad in hopes of taking advantage of Truitt's wealth. Although she portrays herself as an innocent woman, Ralph is on to her deception very quickly upon her arrival. Despite this knowledge Truitt feels a magnetism to Catherine that drives him to marry her anyway. Catherine continues with her plan to poison Truitt and inherit his wealth but becomes conflicted by her growing feelings for him. Despite knowing what she is doing to him, Ralph is driven by his obsession with her and as he sickens, turns a blind eye to her plans. Interwoven with this storyline is the equally intriguing narrative involving Catherine's help in searching for Ralph's estranged son. There were times that I felt like I was reading someone's most base thoughts and inclinations and although there weren't many likable characters in this story, I thought this raw gothic romantic

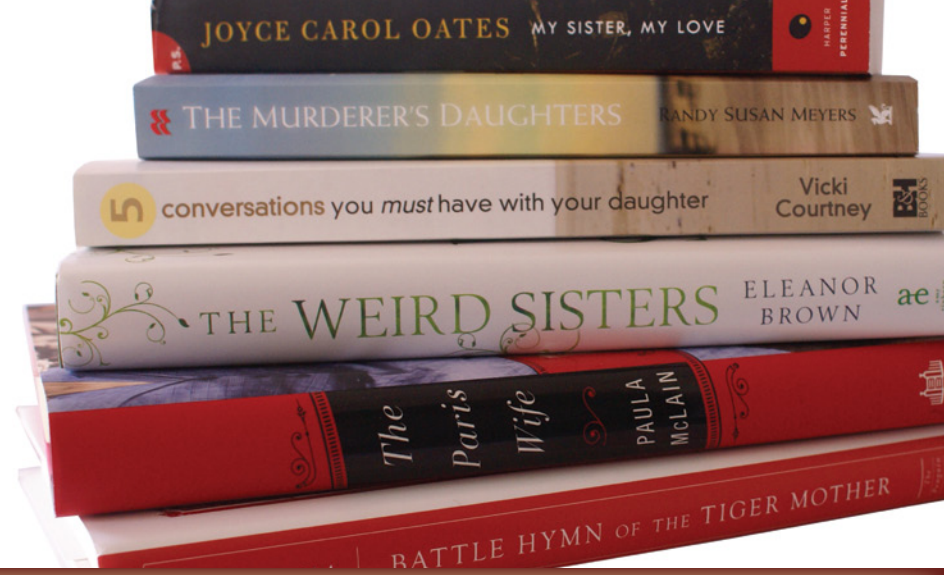
mystery was compelling right to the very end.

You all have probably heard about the controversy behind the reality show, *Sister Wives*, which has brought the subject of plural marriage into our living rooms. *The 19th Wife* by David Ebershoff is for anyone interested in trying to understand the subject of polygamy, its history and potentially shattering impact on women and children. Told in two parallel narratives, this book starts out with a murder in a modern-day polygamous compound in Utah. Jordan Scott, a young gay man who was thrown out of this fundamentalist sect as a child, has returned to the place of his birth to help clear his mother, a sister wife, of the charges she faces for the murder of her husband, Jordan's father. The second narrative takes place over a century ago and tells the story of Ann Eliza Young. She is the rebellious "19th wife" of Brigham Young, prophet and leader of the Mormon Church, and a crusader in the fight to end polygamy. Blending truth with fiction, this book delves into Ann Eliza's and Jordan's stories and the polygamous history of their families. It also includes the fascinating history of the beginning of the Mormon faith and its eventual offshoots. This novel ends up leaving the reader wondering about the mysterious and often incomprehensible power of faith.

Also try reading: *The American Wife* by Curtis Sittenfeld, *The Zookeeper's Wife* by Diane Ackerman, *The Paris Wife* by Paula McLain, *The Tiger's Wife* by Tea Obreht, *The Wife's Tale* by Lori Lansens or *The Pilot's Wife* by Anita Shreve

MOTHERS

It is almost impossible to not have heard any of the brouhaha surrounding the book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Amy Chua. If you just read the excerpts, you might be tempted to think that the author should be



With Mother's Day just recently passed,
the important women
in our lives are front & center in our minds.

arrested for child abuse, but there is much more to this sometimes hilarious, often shocking memoir. Chua's parenting techniques as she raises her daughters in a traditional Chinese manner, is in stark contrast to the more lenient and relaxed style preferred by Westerners. Although leaning a bit too far towards stereotyping different parenting styles, she acknowledges that some of her techniques worked while others failed. While finding it impossible to agree with most of her methods, her memoir made me wonder about the best way we can help our children achieve and become competitive in a very globally competitive world. Perhaps some things can be learned from her unwavering belief in her children's abilities, rather than the way she encouraged them.

Also try reading: Come back: ***A Mother and Daughter's Journey to Hell and Back*** by Claire Fontaine and Mia Fontaine or ***The Gift of an Ordinary Day: A Mother's Memoir*** by Katrina Kenison

DAUGHTERS

An interwoven story of two families who are worlds apart, ***The Secret Daughter*** by Shilpi Somaya Gowda is compulsively readable and at times, heart wrenching. American-born Somer is starting her career as a doctor when she learns that she will never have children. At the same time, in India, Kavita makes a heartbreaking decision to give her newborn daughter away in order to save her child's life. It is this child, Asha, who binds the lives of these women forever. A great book club read, this novel is filled with such discussion topics as adoption, cultural identity and women's roles.

Also try reading: ***The Heretic's Daughter*** by Kathleen Kent, ***The Murderer's Daughter*** by Randy Susan Meyers, ***Five Conversations You Should Have with Your Daughter*** by Vicki Courtney, ***Letter to My Daughter*** by George Bishop or ***The Memory Keeper's Daughter*** by Kim Edwards

SISTERS

The Good Sister by Drusilla Campbell is a novel about four generations of women struggling to overcome a history of violence, dependency and secrecy. Ever since Roxanne Callahan was a very young girl she had been expected to take care of her emotionally unstable sister Simone. After multiple miscarriages and the recent birth of yet another daughter (when her husband is desperate for a son) Simone, suffering from crippling postpartum depression, commits an unimaginable crime. In the glare of national media attention brought on by her sister, Roxanne's new marriage is threatened by her continued feelings of responsibility for her. Roxanne is drawn back into the pain of her troubled past and relives the fraught relationship she and Simone shared with their narcissistic mother. Many subjects for discussion are raised within this book. Among them are the devastation brought on by post partum depression and where the line is drawn when it comes to family responsibility.

Also try reading: ***The Weird Sisters*** by Eleanor Brown, ***Sister of My Heart*** by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni or ***My Sister, My Love*** by Joyce Carol Oates

Anne Laird is the owner of The Town Book Store, an independent bookstore that has been serving Westfield and the surrounding communities since 1934.

The Town Book Store
270 E Broad St
Westfield NJ 0090
908-233-3535
www.townbookstore.com

DO YOU HAVE THE "WRITE" STUFF?

If you have always wanted to be reincarnated as a writer, by all means email me! Unleash your hidden talents with your own column and share your views/expertise with the local community! Denise@hometownquarterly.com